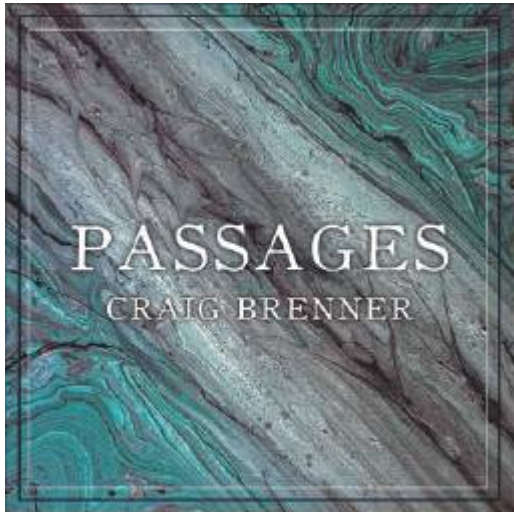


Granting passage: Music students called to boogie woogie

By Connie Shakalis
Special to the H-T



Craig

“Passages” by Craig Brenner. // Craig Brenner, right, with his mentor, Alfred Roberts. (Courtesy photos)



Craig Brenner. (Ed Sawicki / Courtesy photo)

Brenner put his grant money to use and is looking for music students to join his project. Thanks to his Indiana Arts Commission grant, Brenner has composed an album “Passages” and is collaborating with Jackson Creek Middle School’s band and choir director, Joe Donnelly, to involve local students in making music with professionals.

“Joe (Donnelly) is doing this as a favor to me, not as a school activity,” Brenner said. “And I am grateful for his willingness to help.”

“Passages” is actually eight of Brenner’s original compositions, featuring several styles, with Brenner playing piano. Vocalists Lori Brenner and Merrill Garbus, bassists Nate Brenner and Ron Kadish, drummers Dan

Hostetler and Tim Brookshire, guitarists Gordon Bonham and Mike Baker, saxophonists Joe Donnelly and

Jake Belser, trumpeter Kyle Quass, violinist and violist Dena El Saffar, and trombonist Dave Pavolka also perform. Dave Weber of Bloomington's Airtime Studios recorded and mixed the music.

Brenner will provide copies of the album's recorded original music, including charts, for student practice. Students are asked to video themselves playing along with Brenner's recording, and the winning student videos will be posted online for all to watch. Some students may need help in video-making, and they will receive it.

In order to receive the grant, Brenner agreed to write, record and make his music publicly accessible. He also agreed to cast student musicians. Originally, before the pandemic, a public performance had been in the plan: The recording's professional musicians plus the students were to play together live. The thinking was that the students would benefit from working with professionals and by having an in-person audience. Because of COVID-19, however, the performances will be online.

By late August, the recordings and music will be ready for students, and those who contact Brenner or Donnelly will have about three or four weeks to tape their own videos. The project will end Sept. 30, and Brenner and Donnelly will choose videos to post soon thereafter.

Brenner studied with boogie woogie and stride piano master Bob Seeley and blues pianist Big Joe Duskin through a grant from the Indiana Arts Commission. Brenner has played with Bo Didley and opened shows for B. B. King, C. J. Chenier, Queen Ida, Buckwheat Zydeco, Gary Burton, Richard Thompson, Wayne Tups, Honeyboy Edwards, Matt "Guitar" Murphy, the Radiators, Duke Robillard, Jimmy Rogers and Terrance Simien. He has also played piano at venues such as the Blues Piano Boogie Woogie Stomp, StoneSong, Hoosierfest, Oliver Winery, Taste of Bloomington, Indianapolis' Circle Fest, Broad Ripple Art Festival and others.

Donnelly studied music education at Indiana University in the late 1980s. Among his professors were legendary jazz professor David Baker and saxophonist Eugene Rousseau. Donnelly left IU to tour with rock bands, then returned to Chicago to study music and earned a bachelor's degree in music education.

Brenner composed "Passages" to evoke different sets of emotions; he includes playful jazz and boogie woogie — Brenner being part of Craig Brenner and the Crawdads — and one such number is "Tut's Boogie Woogie." additional pieces included "Para-diddle Boogie Woogie" and "Spring Is Near." But the album also features steamy blues ("Some Sexy Blues for Ya Right Here, Y'all"), introspective jazz piano ("Life Is Precious"), reflections on life and death ("No One Should Die Alone," "For My Brother"), and even a contemporary remix by Craig Brenner's son Nate Brenner ("Looking for a Job").

"When composing boogie woogie," Brenner said, "I think about everyday things that interest me." For example, his long-lived cat Tut would run to the piano upon hearing Brenner play. After joining Brenner on the bench for awhile, Tut would stroll along the keyboard. "Tut's Boogie Woogie" is a result of Brenner's fondness of Tut.

"I've benefited from music more than I can describe," Brenner said. Now he's paying it forward.

The Indiana Arts Commission receives funding from the State of Indiana and the National Endowment for the Arts.

For more information, visit <https://www.craigbrenner.com/newsor> contact Craig Brenner at craigbrennerboogies@gmail.com.

Student musicians may go to <https://www.craigbrenner.com/newsto> sign up.